



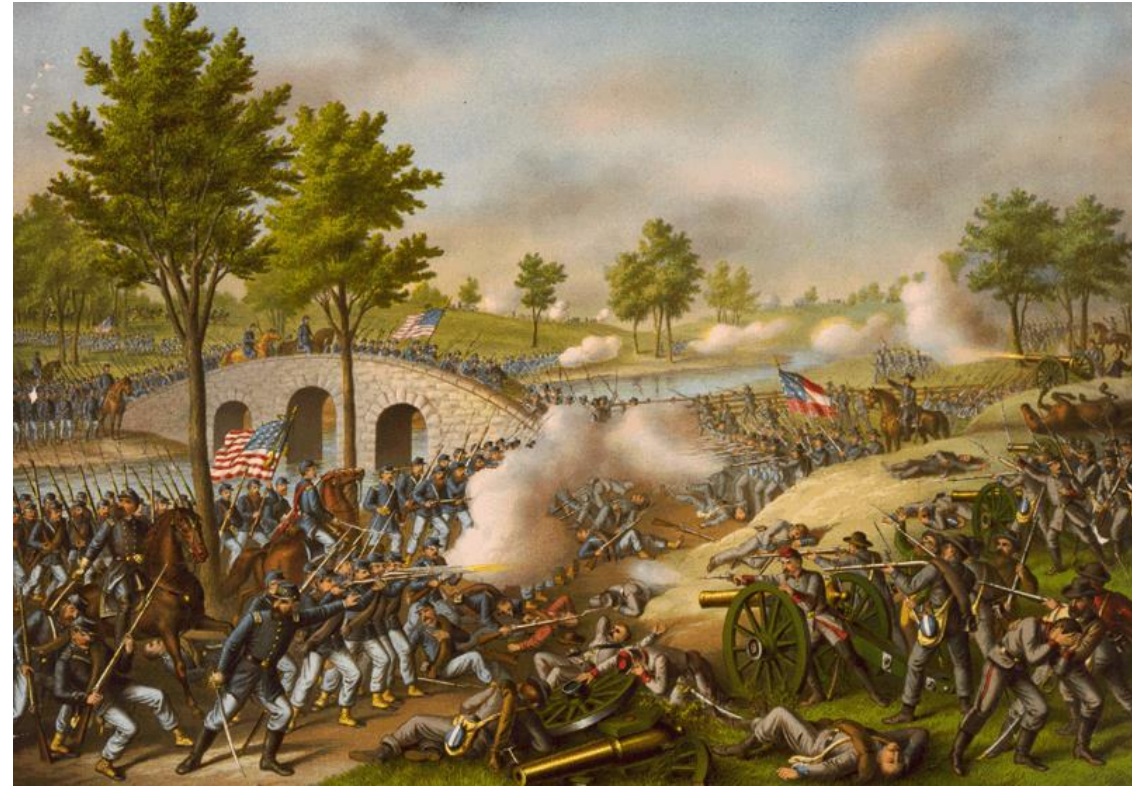
Turning Points of the American Civil War

MAJOR BATTLES, CRITICAL DECISIONS, AND CONSEQUENTIAL EVENTS

The Battle of Antietam, (Sharpsburg, MD) - 1862

The Battle of Antietam, or Sharpsburg, MD, was one of the most important of the war for three reasons:

1. First, by forcing Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to retreat, the Union Army denied Lee a victory in Northern territory which may have encouraged a foreign nation like England or France to intervene on behalf of the Confederacy.
2. Because the notoriously timid and insubordinate George McClellan refused to pursue Lee across the Potomac River, Abraham Lincoln fired him.
3. After claiming victory in the battle, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, changing the goals of the Union for the war, and providing military benefits for the Northern soldiers over the Confederacy.



The Emancipation Proclamation

Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation as a fit and necessary war measure in the autumn of 1862, but it did not become effective until January 1, 1863.

The measure only freed slaves in parts of the South which were actively in rebellion against the United States government. Yet, the slaves emancipated were “now, henceforward, and forever free.”

Slaves in the border states, parts of the South which were not in rebellion (Tennessee, the New Orleans area, and Hampton Roads, VA) were not influenced by Lincoln’s Proclamation.



The Battle of Fredericksburg December 11 – 15, 1862

*“It is well that war is so terrible,
lest we become to fond of it.”*

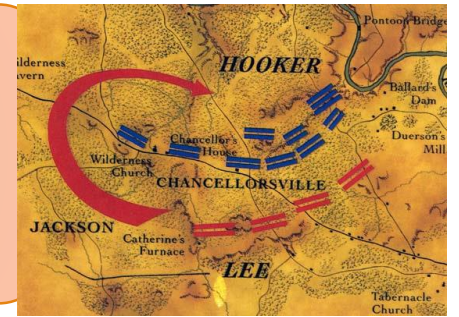
- Attributed to General Robert E. Lee
after the battle of Fredericksburg.

Fredericksburg was probably the low point in the war for the Union. In mid-December of 1862, the Army of the Potomac, under the leadership of Ambrose Burnside, attempted to occupy the city – just a few miles north of Richmond. After using pontoon bridges to cross the Rappahannock River, the Union Army made no less than fourteen attempts to charge up Marye’s Heights to take over Fredericksburg – and each time, they were repulsed by Confederate soldiers. Losses for the Union were so devastating that Ambrose Burnside resigned in horror. Union soldiers sought revenge for the murderous defeat for the remainder for the remainder of the war.



Battle of Chancellorsville May, 1863

Jackson's movement around Hooker's right flank took him completely by surprise. The Union Army was humiliated by Lee once again.



Chancellorsville is generally considered Robert E. Lee's masterpiece. Convinced that Joseph Hooker would be too timid to launch an assault on Fredericksburg after the disaster which had befallen Ambrose Burnside, he divided his already outnumbered army in half and sent Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson around the right flank of the Union Army.

The movement worked with devastating effect. Hooker was taken completely by surprise – despite many warnings of a large army marching behind his right flank from reconnaissance and cavalry units. Devastated again, the Union Army was forced to retreat.

What made the battle a turning point, however, was a unique tragedy for the Confederate Army. While he was scouting out the possibility of a rare night attack to follow up their successes, "Stonewall" Jackson surprised a group of Confederate sentries. They fired upon him, shooting him through the left arm. His arm was amputated. Infection set in, then pneumonia. He would die just a few days later. Lee's right hand man was lost.



The Battle of Gettysburg

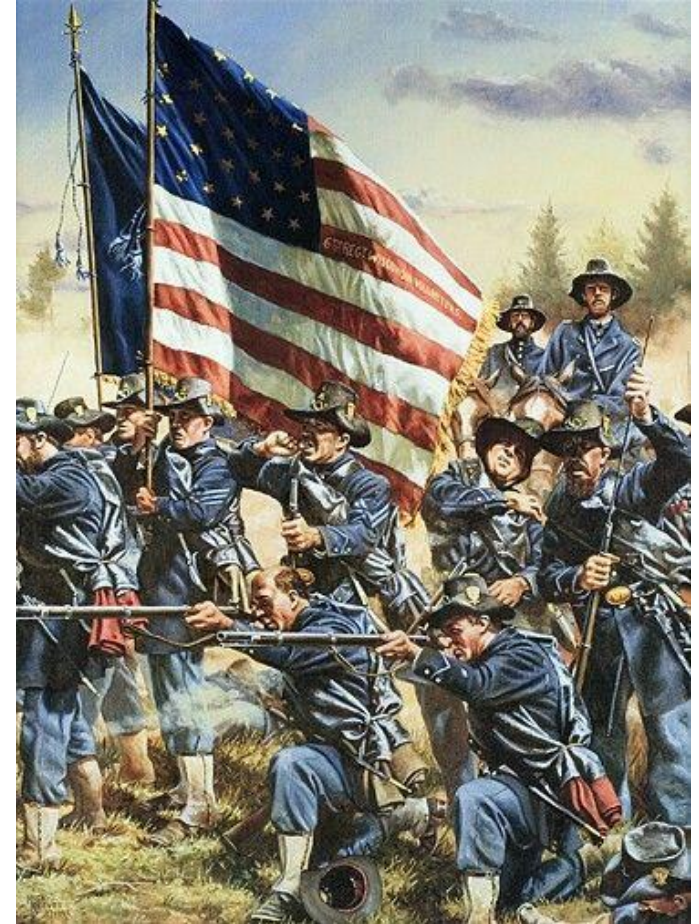
July 1st – July 3rd, 1863



Here is the turning point of the Civil War. Robert E. Lee had led the Army of Northern Virginia into the North, once again. He was seeking a major victory in Union territory, which he hoped would put Washington, DC into a state of panic and attract the attention of a European ally – France, or England perhaps?

The two armies met almost accidentally on land of no particular consequence. Confederate soldiers attempting to raid a shoe depot in Chambersburg, PA collided with Union soldiers. The huge armies would clash into one another's lines about five miles from their initial encounter in Gettysburg.

The battle raged for three days. On the first day, Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine Regiment were miraculously able to control the high ground – Little Round Top – against a massive Confederate assault. On the third day, Lee attempted a direct attack into the center of the Union line. Pickett's Charge, as the attack is known today, was a disastrous failure. Lee's Army was crushed, and would never regain its full strength.



The New York City Draft Riots, July 1863

But now, political disputes took the lead. Many Northerners were not committed to finishing out the war. They hoped to negotiate a settlement with the South, if only to save lives.

When white Northerners initially heard about the Emancipation Proclamation, some felt greater commitment to the cause. Yet, others refused to fight for the liberty of African-Americans. In New York City, a violent race riot broke out. Irish-Americans and Irish immigrants who had been drafted into the Army violently resisted conscription, often attacking African-American communities. At one point an African-American orphanage and school was burned to the ground.

Troops who had fought against the rebels in Gettysburg were now sent by train to New York City to put down the revolts. Could Americans protesting the war – “Copperheads” and “Peace Democrats” undermine the war efforts at this late hour? Many Republicans – including Lincoln – feared they may.



The Siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi

June of 1863 until July 4th, 1863

Vicksburg, MS was one of the last areas of resistance along the Mississippi River; however, from Vicksburg, Confederate guns and cannons could halt the movement of all weapons and supplies along the mighty river.

Ulysses S. Grant was determined to take the city, and organized a siege which would last for over six weeks in order to starve out the people of Vicksburg.

It worked. On July 4th, 1863, the city – which had been renamed “Prairie Dog Town” by Union soldiers – surrendered to Grant. Part two of the Anaconda Plan was now an objective which had been achieved. The Union controlled the entire Mississippi River. Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana had been severed from the remainder of the Confederacy.



Union Soldiers renamed Vicksburg “Prairie Dog Town” because so many of the people had moved into basements in order to avoid the constant Union shelling.

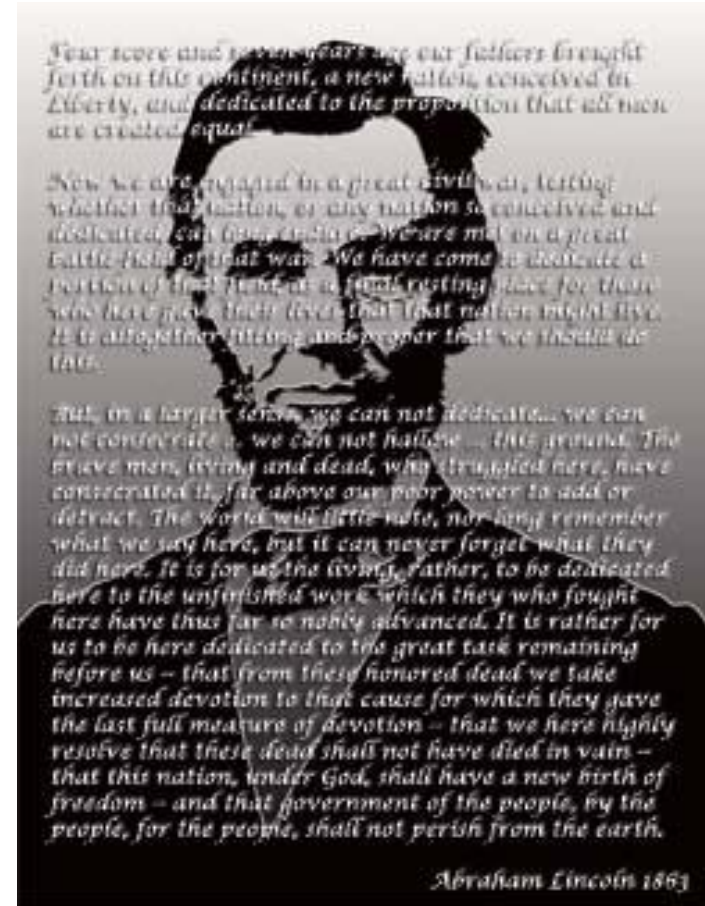
The Gettysburg Address, by Abraham Lincoln Delivered on November 19th, 1863

The purpose of Abraham Lincoln's visit to Gettysburg was to deliver a short speech in which he would dedicate a new national cemetery for the Union soldiers who had died at the battle of Gettysburg.

The speech was extremely short, and most critics panned it immediately. It was not statesmanlike they argued.

Yet, the words themselves are some of the most inspiring in American History. They redefined the goals of the Union, and insisted upon a "new birth of freedom" for the nation.

The keynote speaker that day, Edward Everett, complimented the President for summing up the purpose of the occasion better in two minutes that he had in two hours. The Gettysburg Address is a part of our national creed today.



General Sherman's March to the Sea

Autumn and Winter of 1864

When William Tecumseh Sherman began his "March to the Sea" from Atlanta to Savannah in the autumn of 1864, there were grave doubts about the future of the nation.

Lincoln's re-election in 1864 appeared dubious. The "Peace Democrat" George McClellan was running against the President.

Sherman cut himself off from all supply lines, pledging to fight a "total war" against the citizens of Georgia, and to live off the land. He burned every man-made habitation on the landscape, stole grain and livestock from the people of Georgia, and devastated the states of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina over the next six months.



The Presidential Election of 1864

When Lincoln ran for re-election in 1864, the prospects for the war were extremely uncertain. Although Gettysburg and Vicksburg had been won, the Army of Northern Virginia, under the leadership of Robert E. Lee, still did not seem close to collapse or surrender.

Ulysses S. Grant was fighting a savage war to defeat Lee, but the casualties and deaths continued to pile up. George McClellan, the “Peace Democrat” promised an end to the war – perhaps by negotiation. Many believed that his ex-soldiers would support him. At times, even Lincoln doubted that he would win.

But after a series of crucial victories and the good news of Sherman’s success, the Election of 1864 turned towards Lincoln rapidly. Lincoln insisted that the soldiers should all be allowed to vote – and sent home to do so if necessary. They voted for their commander-in-chief – Lincoln – by huge majorities. Lincoln’s re-election in 1864 guaranteed that nothing short of complete victory would be accepted by the North. The Civil War would be won by the Union.

